

Lesson Plan Ideas

What's New
IN HOME ECONOMICS

A New Role To Teach in the
New Age of Consumerism—

Children As Volunteers: Learning Early To Be Contributors

By Susan J. Ellis

- Models for participation
- Ways of involvement
- Questions for evaluation

TOO OFTEN our society views the young strictly as “takers”—recipients of goods and services—without expectation of anything reciprocal produced or contributed in exchange.

This idea, reiterated daily especially in television commercials, is often accepted by boys and girls themselves. The concept that, as volunteers, young people *can* return something to the community often comes as much a surprise to the child as to adults.

Take a Look and See

- *Children age eight and older serve as museum guides—leading group discussions, showing visitors how to participate in the hands-on exhibits, and answering general questions.*

- *Children individually and in groups help in nursing homes—delivering mail, leading games, transporting residents to and from activities, preparing and serving refreshments, making decorations for bulletin boards and special events.*

- *Fifth and sixth-graders teach an introductory computer course for their parents and other adults as part of a community education series.*

The above situations all involve children under the age of fourteen as

volunteers in one way or another. These youngsters have fun and learn a great deal at the same time that they serve their communities. There are many talented boys and girls like them across the country, active in meaningful volunteer roles.

Children Can Do Great Things

To many people, the idea that *children* should volunteer in their communities is somewhat surprising. They may feel that children are not old enough to volunteer or that children could be exploited in their roles as volunteers. But many children already volunteer without receiving credit for their contributions. What community fair, church bazaar, or other neighborhood event could operate without the help of youngsters? This assistance has been minimized.

By beginning to recognize the volunteering already being done by children, it is possible to find new ways to involve children as volunteers. Teachers are in the unique position of being able to encourage such community participation and to integrate it into established curricula. What better way to demonstrate the meaning of citizenship and “participatory democracy”?

Learning Is Enhanced

Often children have abilities that are not fully challenged by the school environment. Through volunteering, a child can develop a wide range of skills and use these to benefit others. Many of the children who are already volunteering throughout the country are finding that they are learning new things about their neighborhoods, about the meaning of responsibility, and about their own true potential to perform in the "real world" of adults.

Models for Participation

There are a variety of different forms which volunteering by children can take. As you begin planning and thinking about how to involve students in volunteering, it is important to consider various models.

1. The child on his or her own.

Some children do their volunteer work in an organization, working independently. This does not mean they are without supervision or support—far from it. They simply perform the primary tasks of their volunteer jobs without a partner or collaborator.

2. A child with a parent or other adult family member. Often a child volunteers along with one of his or her parents, working together as a team. Variations on this theme are

possible, such as the pairing of a child with both parents, an aunt or uncle, a close family friend, etc.

One combination that is becoming more visible is in divorced family situations where the child volunteers with the non-custody parent. Rather than being the "play parent," volunteering together gives the parent something meaningful to do with his or her son or daughter on a regular basis.

3. Children with other children. Children can be paired with an older sibling, an older child or with other children of the same age already volunteering for an organization. A team is formed, with both partners sharing the responsibilities and also sharing the credit for donating their services. A team can have more than two members, of course, but it is important that each member have a distinct responsibility.

4. One class. With the guidance of an interested teacher, a full class of students can adopt a community project or each student can be encouraged to select something of particular interest. It is important to be sure that the volunteering is indeed voluntary, with each child having the choice of whether or not to participate. Part of the lesson the children will learn is how it feels to voluntarily give time to help others.



March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation

The diversity of volunteer roles children can fill is tremendous. Children work as guides, tutors, advocates, fundraisers, researchers. They also, of course, act as errand runners, clean-up assistants, and staplers. The following guidelines will help you find for your students volunteer roles that use the full range of their abilities.

Involve Children in Planning

The very process of developing a volunteer position can be an important learning experience. Hence, try to involve your students as much as possible in all phases of the planning and selection process. There are no limits to what your groups can do—volunteers are active in every aspect of community life.

One of the basic premises of a democracy is that a citizen of any age can identify a need or problem and go to work on it. Therefore, you can encourage your class to determine the things about which they are most concerned and show them that they have the power to do something

Salutes to the Volunteer

- Viewers of the January 2, 1984, Pasadena Tournament of Roses Parade in California will see a "Salute to the Volunteer" as more than 60 floral floats in the parade feature all aspects of volunteering.

- Extension home economists across the nation will share the total accumulation of their individual private volunteer efforts at their annual meeting in October following this 1983-84 special year of commitment in celebration of their 50th anniversary.

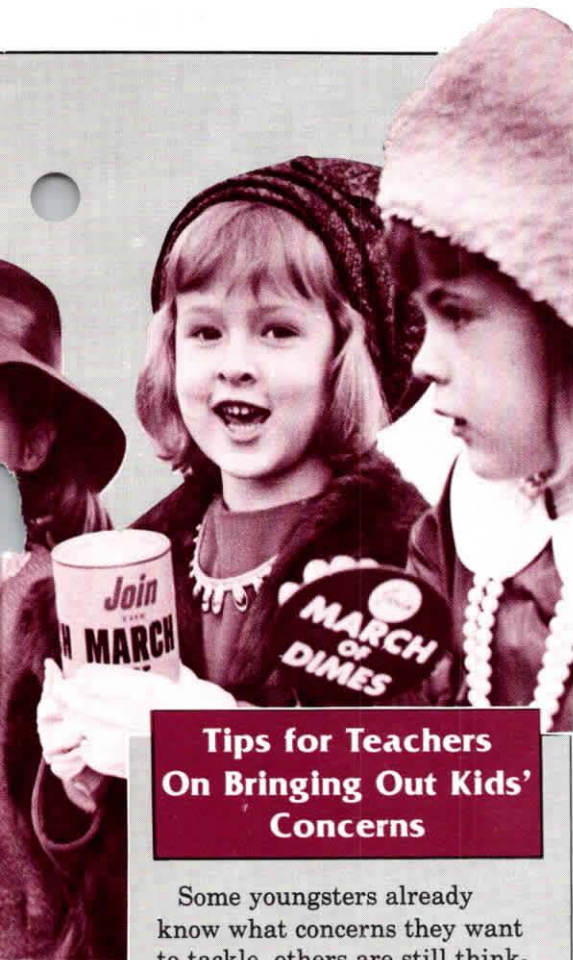
- The third annual President's Volunteer Action Awards will be presented at the White House in April to honor individuals and



groups for innovative community volunteer service.

- Globally, volunteering is a growing movement. An international conference in 1984 in Bogota, Columbia, by the International Association for Volunteer Effort will promote ideas and techniques and look at trends for the year 2000 and voluntary work.

- At a special World Future Society conference, "Working Now and in the Future," held this past August in Washington, D.C., panelists at a session on volunteer organizations called volunteering critically important to the economy and said that in the future you will be asked not just about your work, but "What else do you do?"



Tips for Teachers On Bringing Out Kids' Concerns

Some youngsters already know what concerns they want to tackle, others are still thinking about what they want to do. "One way to proceed," suggests Future Homemakers of America in its leadership material* "is to help young people identify concerns through brainstorming." Here are recommended rules to follow:

- List everyone's ideas.
- Don't discuss ideas during the brainstorming process.
- Don't judge ideas.
- Repetition is okay.
- Enjoy the silences and continue on.

Some other ways which Future Homemakers of America suggests for getting at concerns are—

- student surveys
- questionnaires
- rap sessions
- discussions
- topic investigations
- open-ended sentences.

For example, see what thinking results from a sentence such as: "If I had the power, I'd make the world. . . ."

***Handbook for Youth-Centered Leadership, Future Homemakers of America.**

about these.

There are no inherent restrictions on the type of volunteer projects children can do. Even if there is no ready-made opportunity for addressing the identified need, the children can proceed on their own if you are willing to provide leadership. Start by deciding what you all want to do.

Selecting a Project

It may not be easy at first to select a volunteer project. The children may need some orientation to the concept of "volunteering." You might consider offering a curriculum unit on citizen participation. Project selection need not be limited by prior experience.

One variable is time. Will you and your class consider a one-time project? Can you consider a long-term or on-going project? A second important variable is whether you will link with an already-established volunteer program or independently launch a project.

Outlets for Volunteer Energy

As you do some research, you may be surprised at the number and scope of established volunteer programs in your community. Just about every type of nonprofit agency and many government offices have structured ways for adults to contribute voluntary services.

Look beyond the obvious hospitals, nursing homes, etc., to volunteer programs in such settings as parks, museums, fire departments, courts, public radio stations, and more. Service-learning projects may already be underway for older students in some of these agencies. Perhaps these settings would be willing to consider younger students too.

Apart from these, most all-volunteer organizations and associations sponsor projects involving their members. Such groups might also welcome the volunteer contributions of your students.

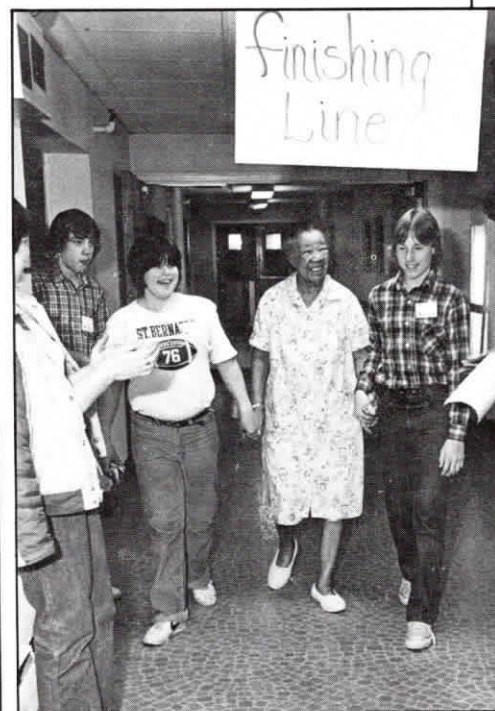
When you consider the wide range of public service performed by civic clubs, fraternal organizations, labor unions, professional societies, advocacy groups, tenant organizations,

and social clubs, you will see that the interests of your students probably coincide easily with efforts already underway.

A useful resource in your search for possible volunteer assignments would be the Voluntary Action Center (VAC), if your community has one. VACs act as clearinghouses to match interested people with volunteer opportunities. The Youth Division of your local chapter of the American Red Cross can also be helpful.

Narrow Down the Choices

Once you have done some exploring and researching, it is time to



Future Homemakers of America

approach the few specific sites that interest you and your students most. Talk to the person in charge of volunteers. Some organizations have a person who is called the Director of Volunteers or another clearly recognizable title. In some settings, the person who directs volunteers also handles a variety of other responsibilities, hence it may take some persistence to locate the right person.

A friendly warning: the idea of children volunteering is quite new to many people who direct volunteers. Your suggestion that your students would be a valuable addition to the organization may need elabora-

7 Good Reasons To Volunteer

Sherill Koski, director of youth volunteers at the March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation in New York, believes there are plenty of motivations for young people to get involved in volunteering. What's in it?

Opportunity—

1. To put one's special talent to use.
2. To test skills and learn new ones.
3. To make new friends and try new challenges.
4. To explore a related career field.
5. To make contacts in one's own community.
6. To enrich lives of others through helping.
7. To enjoy recognition for a job well done.

March of Dimes programs exist in local communities across the country. They depend upon volunteers and many are youth. For more information and materials write to: Sherill Koski, March of Dimes Birth Defects Foundation, 1275 Mamaroneck Avenue, White Plains, NY 10605.

tion in order to win an enthusiastic reception.

Stick with it! If one organization is unresponsive, approach other similar groups. Organizations already utilizing children as volunteers will welcome you.

An organization that does not currently work with any adult volunteers may not be as receptive to your idea as would be a group already comfortable in using adult volunteers. Groups currently involving teenage volunteers may also be open to the possibility of volunteering by children and care more about your students' abilities and maturity than actual ages.

Prepare To Sell the Idea

Most people who are in charge of an organization's volunteers are

quite approachable, but some are more willing than others to innovate. Prepare to do some selling, both of the concept of young volunteers and of your group's talents. If an organization cannot accommodate your children and their interests, ask for ideas on what other places you might contact.

Evaluate the Assignment

Here are some questions to ask about each potential placement:

1. Are the volunteer positions clearly defined?
2. Will it truly utilize and develop the children's talents?
3. What will they learn from the volunteer work?
4. Will they be doing something useful for the organization?
5. How much supervision will they be getting?
6. What is the style and manner of the supervisor?
7. Above all, does your class seem excited about the volunteering? Volunteering should be fun as well as educational.

New Teaching in a New Age

As teachers, you prepare your students for adult life by giving them a taste of a variety of experiences. Volunteering should be just as much a part of a child's education.

Volunteering will continue to play an important part in children's lives as they grow older. Most adults in our society do volunteer work of some sort and most began this participation early in life.

Children don't magically turn into "citizens" when they become old enough to vote. What preparation will they really have had for the responsibilities citizenship entails? Volunteering is training—experiencing the role of producing and discovering it equal or exceeding in reward and satisfaction to that of consuming.

Susan J. Ellis is president of Energize Associates, a training, consulting, and publications firm in Philadelphia, specializing in volunteerism. She created and operated a volunteer program for the Philadelphia Family

*Court and has conducted training for leaders of volunteer programs in 33 states and Canada, including the National School Volunteer Program and various local school districts. She herself volunteers in the role of editor-in-chief of **The Journal of Volunteer Administration**. Ellis has a master's degree in Folklore and Folklife from the University of Pennsylvania. Her book, **Children As Volunteers**, is published by Energize Associates (5450 Wissahickon Avenue, Philadelphia, PA 19144) and has more help on making the idea work.*

ALL PEOPLE EVERYWHERE IN ALL WAYS ARE

VOLUNTEERS*

Try It

TRY IT! INVOLVEMENT ACTIVITY

Make a wall-size facsimile of this mini-poster from Energize—"All People Everywhere in All Ways Are Volunteers." Sponsor a school-wide assessment of all the ways students, teachers, and staff are volunteering—from "crossing guard" to afterschool "4-H leader."

Don't forget to list those who contribute volunteer time to your school, whether it's a sponsoring business or embassy or guest artist or parent aide.

As a class project, consider spearheading a volunteer talent bank or referral service to help match requests for help with willing contributors of time.

Resource

• *Families Volunteer—A Workbook for Involving Families*, \$5.00 postpaid from Volunteer Readership, P.O. Box 1807, Boulder, CO 80306. The workbook is the outgrowth of a three-year demonstration project in ten pilot communities. It is published by the Mountain States Health Corporation and Volunteer—The National Center for Citizen Involvement, 1111 North 19th Street, Suite 500, Arlington, VA 22209.